

THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Raina and Gerda and their relationship. How do their personalities and their relationships with each other change over the course of the novel?
2. Both Raina and Gerda find their hearts involved in unlikely—and even illicit—entanglements. How does the blizzard change their perception of love?
3. Anette Pedersen is given away by her family. Why do you think her mother made the decision to sell her to another family?
4. Nebraska bills itself as the Garden of Eden. But Gavin Woodson, who writes the articles that lure foreigners from their homeland to the prairie, leaves “Godforsaken Omaha” to find and connect with surviving homesteaders. Why do you think he does that?
5. What modern day parallels do you see in this story? 6. What does the memory of the young woman he encountered prior to the storm come to mean to Gavin?
7. The storm seems to level the playing field between men and women—Anette and Frederick, Raina and Tor, Anna and Gunnar. What are your observations on the similarities and differences between these pairs of characters when it comes to their survival and resilience in harsh conditions?
8. How does the storm effect Ollie, or change his views towards Omaha?
9. What did it mean to pick up and move across an ocean in the late nineteenth century? What type of sacrifice was required of these immigrants?
10. Were you aware of this historic weather event? Were you familiar with the Homestead Act?
11. “Moving forward” seems to be an overarching theme of the novel—whether it means heading out into the blizzard or dealing with relationships. How does each character move forward throughout the storm and beyond?
12. Raina asks the doctor why he came to Nebraska. Why do you think the characters who came to Nebraska remain there?
13. Discuss Raina and Gerda’s relationships with and perceptions of their parents before and after the storm. What are Mama and Papa’s expectations of their daughters?
14. What are your thoughts about the end of the book, about the path each sister took?